

# **Seeds to Success Youth Farmstand Project**

## **Submitter's Contact Information:**

Name: Linda Strieter  
Title: Gloucester County 4-H Agent  
Affiliation: Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension  
Mailing Address: 1200 North Delsea Drive, Clayton, NJ 08312-1096  
E-mail Address: strieter@aesop.rutgers.edu  
Telephone Number: (856) 307-6450 Ext. 3  
Fax Number: (856) 881-4191

Name: Lydia B. Blalock, Ph.D.  
Title: Extension Specialist in Youth Development  
Affiliation: Rutgers  
Mailing Address: The State University of New Jersey Home Economics  
Building, 71 Lipman Drive New Brunswick, New Jersey,  
08901  
Telephone Number: (732) 932-9705  
Fax Number: (732) 932-3126

## **Program of Distinction Category**

### **Leadership, Citizenship & Life Skills Categories**

- Workforce Preparation

### **Science, Engineering & Technology Literacy Categories**

- Foods & Nutrition

### **Healthy Lifestyles Categories**

- Nutrition Education
- Healthy Relationships, Good Decisions

### **Youth in Governance Categories**

- Community Development

### **Organizational Strategies Categories**

- Partnership & Grants

## **Sources of funding that support this program**

CYFAR Children, Youth & Families-at-Risk: New Communities Project  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, CSREES, 2003, 2004, 2005 (pending)  
New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Jersey Fresh Matched Funds  
Grant, 2004 Valero Refinery Benefit for Children Golf Classic, 2005  
Borough of Glassboro (NJ), Neighborhood Preservation Funding  
Program, 2005 Glassboro (NJ) School District, 2005.

## **Knowledge and Research Base**

Experiential learning opportunities and assessment at the farmstands are based on the *Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills* (1992). In-school nutrition education uses curricula developed and/or approved through the New Jersey Nutrition Education Program (<http://www.rutgers.njfsnep.org>). *Kids in Biz, Preparing Young People for Work* (Lennon, D. & Strieter, L., 1997) is the main business basics resource.

Lessons on money and banking, "FUNDamental Finance," a pilot series, is based on two curricula: *Financial Champions* (2002), through the 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System and the High School Financial Planning Program (2001) from the National Endowment for Financial Education. To accommodate the targeted special needs, at-risk youth, we found it necessary to revise some reading levels and activities.

### **Needs Assessment**

This project addresses a variety of demonstrated needs in our county: work force preparedness (particularly for special needs youth), improved nutrition/health, life-skills development, service learning, and economic development through expanded markets for local farmers and availability of fresh nutritious produce to residents. As outlined in the 2000 Gloucester County Demographic Survey, 46% of households in Paulsboro and 38% of households in both Woodbury and Glassboro fall at or below the federal poverty level. The farmstands accept vouchers from eligible WIC (Women, Infants and Children) and (FNMP) Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program recipients. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides this benefit to those residents who are at greater risk of medical or nutritional deficiencies due to inadequate diets and are low income.

The communities where the farmstands are located were anxious to bring fresh locally grown produce to their residents in areas that farmers are not typically able to reach. Although our county's schools provide workforce preparation to special needs students, there is a significant disparity between the number of youth who require training and the number of hands-on workplace opportunities (particularly entrepreneurial experiences) available to those youth. This project improves the potential for employability of these youth.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The project has four key goals: provide workforce preparation and improved self-esteem to special needs teens; create retail outlets that bring affordable, nutritious foods to consumers; teach valuable workforce readiness and life skills; and offer service learning and economic development opportunities. Seeds to Success, an entrepreneurial and life skills training program, prepares at-risk 14-18 year olds for the workforce. Through classroom education during the school year and on-the-job training, these teens are better able to take charge of their futures and become active, contributing members of the workforce and their communities. More specifically, the program objectives are to teach special needs youth how to select and prepare locally grown fruits and vegetables for use in meal preparation, how to handle money and banking procedures and to provide them opportunities to acquire workforce readiness and business skills by selling produce at a youth-run farmstand during summer months. Students are recruited to take advantage of the nine-week summer work experience and are encouraged to continue their work with Seeds to Success year to year, helpful in longitudinal assessment. In 2004, 28 youth (32% recruited from the classroom instruction phase) applied and were accepted for the

youth farmstand component of the project. Seven (25%) students returned for a second year.

### **Target Audience**

The targeted youth live in low income areas where employment opportunities are traditionally limited.

### **Program Design and Content**

#### ***Type of Program***

Seeds to Success, an entrepreneurial and life skills training program, prepares at-risk 14-18 year olds for the workforce.

#### ***Methods used to deliver program***

Through classroom education during the school year and on-the-job training, teens in the program are better able to take charge of their futures and become active, contributing members of the workforce and their communities. The program objectives teaches special needs youth how to select and prepare locally grown fruits and vegetables for use in meal preparation, how to handle money and banking procedures and to provide them opportunities to acquire workforce readiness and business skills by selling produce at a youth-run farmstand during summer months. Students are recruited to take advantage of the nine week summer work experience and are encouraged to continue their work with Seeds to Success year to year, helpful in longitudinal assessment.

#### ***Curricula and/or educational materials***

The work-site and in-school components require different but correlated resources. For pre-season and work site training, as well as the summer farmstand operation, the organization, policies and procedures are based on the Youth Farmstand Project Manual (1994) developed for the New Brunswick Urban Ecology Program sponsored by Rutgers University. Extensive revisions and updates are now underway. Separate youth and supervisor manuals will be piloted during the 2005 farmstand season.

#### ***Partnerships or collaborations***

This unique program is collaborative in every sense of the word. In just the first two years of the project, faculty and staff from the three Rutgers Cooperative Extension program areas, four schools, three communities, and more than 60 agencies and interested individuals united to help more than 300 special needs at-risk youth in Gloucester County, New Jersey.

### **Program Evaluation**

#### ***Process***

The youth retention rate was 89% in 2004, which is estimated to be above the national standard. Of the 28 youth initially enrolled in the project, 25 youth completed the selling season. Three youth left the project due to family situations, rather than a desire to leave the program. Through

anecdotal dialogue and more formalized focus groups and supervisor interviews, we learned that most of the youth enjoy their work and feel they are learning valuable skills.

Documentation showing improved workforce and life skills of youth in the project is derived from various means of assessment. Supervisors complete SCANS (workplace competencies) Checklists on youth at each farmstand. Focus groups and surveys of all youth, collaborators and even customers demonstrate project impacts. The two primary methods of evaluating the target audience are as follows:

**FUNDamental Finance**, a pilot lesson series in 2004, included pre- and post-tests to determine the student's ability to complete correctly a blank bank check and deposit slip. Of the 34 students who completed both, the following results were reached:

- The pre-test scores ranged from 0 correct to 18 correct with an average of 7.71 correct.
- The post-test scores ranged from 1 correct to 21 correct. The average was 10.29 correct.
- 24 students demonstrated increased skills on the post-test, several by as much as 8 to 10 points.
- The average increase in scores was 2.59. The lessons, activities and evaluation instruments are being refined to better address the abilities and needs of the targeted students.

Youth participated in a **Skill-a-thon** on the last day of training in June 2004 before the farmstands opened, and again after the last day of business in August 2004. Youth were tested on five skills: ability to make change and process government vouchers, produce identification, use of a cash register, use of a produce scale and knowledge of equivalent weights, and knowledge of produce-related measurement terms.

- Youth demonstrated a statistically significant improvement (alpha .05 or less) in three (3) of the five (5) skills: ability to make change/process government vouchers, produce identification and use of a produce scale/knowledge of equivalent weights.
- Failure to achieve improvement in the final two categories may have resulted from lack of time using those particular skills during the work experience. These areas will be more closely monitored in the future.
- Total scores also demonstrated a statistically significant gains in skills from the pre-test to the post-test (alpha = .014).

### ***Outcomes and Impacts***

FUNDamental Finance, a pilot lesson series in 2004, included pre and post tests to determine the student's ability to complete correctly a blank bank check and deposit slip. Of the 34 students who completed both, the following results were reached:

- The pre-test scores ranged from 0 correct to 18 correct with an average of 7.71 correct.

- The post-test scores ranged from 1 correct to 21 correct. The average was 10.29 correct.
- 24 students demonstrated increased skills on the post test, several by as much as 8 to 10 points.
- The average increase in scores was 2.59. The lessons, activities and evaluation instruments are being refined to better address the abilities and needs of the targeted students.

Youth participated in a Skill-a-thon on the last day of training in June 2004 before the farmstands opened, and again after the last day of business in August 2004. Youth were tested on five skills: ability to make change and process government vouchers, produce identification, use of a cash register, use of a produce scale and knowledge of equivalent weights, and knowledge of produce-related measurement terms.

- Youth demonstrated a statistically significant improvement (alpha .05 or less) in three (3) of the five (5) skills: ability to make change/process government vouchers, produce identification and use of a produce scale/knowledge of equivalent weights.
- Failure to achieve improvement in the final two categories may have resulted from lack of time using those particular skills during the work experience. These areas will be more closely monitored in the future.
- Total scores also demonstrated a statistically significant gains in skills from the pre-test to the post-test (alpha = .014).

### ***Communication to stakeholders***

The project has an active County Council consisting of 20 influential individuals representing the entire local community who work collaboratively with us to expand and sustain the project. This coming summer, in response to community-wide interest, there will be an additional farmstand. Funding was initiated totally through collaborator support. In addition to the County Council, our supporters include more than 60 collaborators and stakeholders, such as, school administrators, guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, local and state government and other agency representatives, farmers, business people and youth advocates. We keep our stakeholders informed of program news and impacts by providing news releases, presentations, an informational exhibit board, a fact sheet and youth brochure and updates and details on both local and state websites. The county government administrators recently recognized Seeds to Success, as a significant county-wide project. They anticipate that we will receive a 2005 National Association of Counties (NACO) award as an exemplary program benefiting underserved children.

### **Program Sustainability**

The project will be sustainable for three primary reasons: Impressive sales volume: Total sales exceeded \$10,000 each year of operation. Local farmers are supportive and working to meet the demands of the new customer base; Strong community support as documented through customer surveys. County and municipal economic development organizations joined

on as stakeholders and have publicly expressed continued support in light of the economic and other positive impacts in their communities. All three boroughs have initiatives in place to address neighborhood revitalization and; Food Security: WIC and Senior Farmstand Nutrition voucher program through USDA accounted for 16% of total sales in both years of operation.

### **Replication**

Factors validating the achievement of the farmstands' success, which can be applied to any community based project include: collaborators' buy-in. i.e., WIC and Senior Nutrition Vouchers; community support (commercial, political, school systems) and; public relations/marketing efforts. More than 30 television, radio and newspaper features and consistent use of the logo have helped to create a uniform image and establish a community identity.

### **Rationale and Importance of Program**

Several of the farmstand youth are participating in conferences and summits giving them public speaking experience and improved self-confidence. But, more important than all of the above, is that the project is helping foster citizenship, workplace readiness, improved self-esteem and personal development in every youth involved with the Seeds to Success Youth Farmstand Project.

### **References**

- U.S. Department of Labor (1992). *Learning for living: A blueprint for high performance*. Retrieved April 13, 2004, from <http://wdr.doleta.gov/SCANS/lal/lal.pdf>
- New Jersey Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (2005). *Easy ways to eat more fruits & vegetables*. Retrieved January 30, 2004 from [http://www.rutgers.njfsnep.org/edu\\_materials/curriculum/3/templates/p1.asp](http://www.rutgers.njfsnep.org/edu_materials/curriculum/3/templates/p1.asp)
- Lennon, D. & Strieter, L. (1997). *Kids in biz: Preparing young people for work*. Clayton, NJ: Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Atlantic County.
- Furry, M., Mincemoyer, C. et al. (2002). *Money moves: A youth guide for saving, spending and other money skills*. MN: 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System.
- National Endowment for Financial Education (2001). *NEFE high school financial planning program: Student guide*. Greenwood Village, CO: National Endowment for Financial Education.